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SUBJECT: Outlook for a Maghreb Summit [redacted]

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Central Intelligence Agency



Washington, D. C. 20505

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

15 April 1986

Outlook for a Maghreb Summit

Summary

A possible meeting in May between Algerian President Bendjedid and Moroccan King Hassan could be the forerunner of a greater Maghreb summit in the coming months. Since the beginning of the year, the five states of North Africa -- Morocco, Mauritania, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya -- have talked increasingly about a "Greater Arab Maghreb" and the necessity for a regional summit to discuss the concept. Leaders in these countries always have paid lip service to Maghreb unity, but meetings between them of late suggest that the prospects for such a forum are better than usual. The impetus appears to be coming primarily from President Bendjedid of Algeria who met with Qadhafi in late January and reportedly plans to meet soon with King Hassan. 

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Uncertainties about the stability of alliances in the region are the driving force behind these contacts, rather than pan-Arab or altruistic desires for cooperation. Private agendas would dominate any summit. The Western Sahara problem would be the principal focus of any meeting attended by both Algeria and Morocco. The animosities between the states preclude any comprehensive and lasting political settlement. 

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This memorandum was prepared by   
 the Maghreb Branch, Arab-Israeli Division, Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis. Information as of 18 April 1986 was used in its preparation. Questions and comments may be addressed to Chief, Arab-Israeli Division, 

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The latest verbiage about Maghreb unity comes from Algiers. President Bendjedid, in a major foreign policy address on 8 April, stated that Algeria's intensive contacts with Libya, Tunisia, and Mauritania in recent months involved consultations on regional unity. He claimed such a goal must be based on economic as well as political factors. Bendjedid also hinted that a unity project may be unveiled shortly, and that it would be subject to a public referendum.

Libyan leader Qadhafi made similar pronouncements last February following several meetings between Algerian and Libyan officials, including his summit in late January with Bendjedid. These initiatives have been complemented by calls for a Maghreb conference by Tunisia and travel to all of the capitals in the region by Mauritanian President Taya. The last effort to bring the states together had been Tunisian President Bourguiba's attempt in early 1985, but Algeria refused to attend because the Polisario was not given a seat at the conference.

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High-level Algerian-Moroccan contacts appear to be the next phase of the emerging initiative toward a summit. Bendjedid said in his April speech that unity in the region could not be achieved without a resolution of the Western Sahara dispute. King Hassan said in a press interview in late March that he expected to meet soon with Bendjedid. Hassan may host a meeting with the Algerian President next month. US diplomats in Morocco report that planning for the summit is well advanced.

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### What's the Game?

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Algeria: Algiers appears to be the most preoccupied with the idea of Maghreb unity. Its traditional hostility with Morocco has been compounded by tension with Libya, despite a recent warming trend between the two countries. President Bendjedid's meeting with Libyan leader Qadhafi, as well as his prospective meeting with King Hassan, probably stems from Bendjedid's efforts to break the Morocco-Libyan union and relieve military pressures on one or both of Algeria's borders--Algeria is the only country bordering all of the other states--with these two adversaries.

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Libyan threats against Tunisia and Morocco's fight with the Polisario complement Algeria's concerns about its national security, and thus are key motives for Algerian outreach to both countries. Developments in the Western Sahara dispute over the past few years have worked against Algiers' interests. The Algerian-backed Polisario guerrillas, although able to mount occasional attacks on the berm, have lost the military initiative,

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[Redacted]

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[Redacted] Algiers, faced with drastically declining petroleum revenues, no longer can afford to finance the insurgency. [Redacted]

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[Redacted] Although there are no signs that Bendjedid is prepared to give in to Morocco's demand for full sovereignty over the Western Sahara, he appears more flexible on the terms of a settlement. Algiers probably would support a degree of political autonomy that would preserve the identity of the local Sahrawi people. [Redacted]

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Morocco: King Hassan generally has been the spectator to efforts to produce a summit. He would nevertheless be willing to meet with other leaders; indeed, the King would want to join any successful Algerian initiative to sponsor a Maghreb summit. As long as he has the military advantage in the Western Sahara, Hassan probably will be unwilling to relinquish the gains he has made. Nonetheless, the the conflict is costly -- the majority of Moroccan armed forces are deployed in the Western Sahara -- and there have been indications of morale problems among the troops. Hassan also is concerned about growing Algerian-Libyan ties. The King probably hopes contacts with Bendjedid will help delay additional diplomatic gains for Algeria and the Polisario in international fora, such as the non-aligned movement and the UN. [Redacted]

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Tunisia: Tunis' interest in a Maghreb summit probably stems from its small size and political and military weakness. Prime Minister Mzali's recent call for a summit probably stems in part from Algerian pressure and fear that Algiers and Tripoli might reach an accord that would be detrimental to its security. [Redacted]

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Mauritania: Nouakchott, like Tunis, would feel constrained to attend a Maghreb summit. Mauritania currently is linked with Algeria and Tunisia in a tripartite Treaty of Fraternity and Concord signed in 1983, but the Taya regime has adopted a neutral position toward Algeria and Morocco. Northwestern Mauritania gradually has become a battle ground between Morocco and the Polisario, and the prospect for additional berm construction in the Western Sahara by Morocco would place greater pressure on the country's northern borders. [Redacted]

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Additional fighting could undermine President Taya's already unstable regime. [Redacted]

[Redacted]

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Libya: Qadhafi's willingness to attend would depend on his ability to consolidate his power at home in the wake of the US airstrike. Because of Qadhafi's ideological commitment to unity and Libya's interest in rallying Arab neighbors at a time of increased pressure from the United States, under normal circumstances he would favor such an idea. He would view a meeting as an opportunity to enhance his own prestige in the region and the Arab world. Qadhafi also would seek to bolster the flagging political union with Morocco, demonstrate that differences with Tunisia were in the past, and build solid relations with Algeria. However, Qadhafi will resist any attempt by Algeria to openly support the Polisario -- as it had done before the treaty with Morocco -- and to cave in to Tunisia's demands for normal relations. [redacted]

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### Prospects and Implications for the United States

In our view, a Maghreb summit involving all five countries is dependent upon the success of the upcoming Bendjedid-Hassan meeting. Algeria and Morocco long have been arch rivals, and any agreement between them would remove the principal barrier. Even if a successful Hassan-Bendjedid meeting paved the way for a five-nation summit, we believe there is little likelihood that the countries will solve the many problems that divide them. Except for broader regional and Arab issues, in our view, the parties would be loathe to make the compromises necessary to resolve specific Maghreb problems -- particularly the Western Sahara. [redacted]

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An unsuccessful meeting could draw Algeria closer to Libya and encourage Bendjedid to hold a four-nation summit, with or without the Polisario. Algiers probably would see such a move as a way of demonstrating its predominance and a way of applying pressure on Morocco. The effect of such a meeting would be negative for Rabat, and potentially break the Libyan-Moroccan union. A push by Algeria for such a meeting, and Libyan agreement to attend, would also put Tunisia and Mauritania in a difficult position. Neither country can afford to antagonize its powerful neighbors, but they also would not want Algerian and Libyan cooperation to progress to the point that they would control their foreign policy. [redacted]

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A five-nation summit and the promise of some lessening of tension in the region would enhance US interests. A four-nation summit dominated by Algeria and Libya would work against US interests. Even if the conference precipitated the break-up of the Libya-Morocco union, Libya would be less isolated, and Tripoli's strengthened ties with Algeria would indirectly promote Soviet interests. Morocco and Tunisia, the nations closest to the US in the region, would find themselves with reduced influence, and they would be more dependent on the US for military and diplomatic support. [redacted]

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